

QUESTIONS FROM AUSTRALIA

(Siobhan Kilmartin)

1978

Question Seeing sees visible object and there is thinking of shape and form. Saññā (memory, a cetasika which accompanies each citta) remembers or marks the object which is experienced so that it can be recognized later on. Visible object is only what appears through the eyes, there is no person or thing in visible object. Still, we think of concepts time and again, we pay attention to shape and form. What does saññā mark? Visible object or shape and form and concepts?

Answer What saññā marks depends on the object which citta experiences. There are many moments of seeing just visible object, and the saññās which accompany such moments 'mark' visible object. There are moments of paying attention to shape and form, and these are different from seeing. Also at such moments there is saññā and these saññās 'mark' what citta experiences at such moments. When we think that we see a person or a thing, the object is a concept. Saññā marks that concept.

You were wondering why there are cittas which experience concepts time and again. We remember concepts because of saññā. But one can remember concepts with wrong view, then it is wrong saññā or perversity of saññā. The sotāpanna can also remember concepts, but he has no wrong view. He can think of people, there are conditions, but he has no misunderstanding of the moment of seeing which just experiences the visible object, and the moment of thinking which thinks of concepts. This teaches us a lesson. We should not try to avoid thinking of concepts, but learn the characteristic of thinking too, as not self. We may sometimes go off the right track and try to be aware of visible object only. But our life should be quite natural, just our ordinary daily life with all the thinking.

An interesting question came up during Khun Sujin's visit to England:

When we cultivate mettā, mettā is directed towards persons. But in reality there are no people, there are only nāma and rūpa. How then can the sotāpanna have mettā?

Khun Sujin answered that also the sotāpanna can think of people, but he does not think with wrong view. After the seeing there can, also for the sotāpanna, be thinking of concepts, of people. When he thinks, his thinking can be accompanied by mettā.

Question Visible object has different characteristics, Can these different characteristics be known by seeing?

Answer When one would compare the object of this moment of seeing and the object of that moment of seeing it is thinking, not seeing. In England the question came up about seeing, and focussing on this or that thing or person. All that appears through the eyes

when there are conditions for seeing is visible object. 'Don't they all appear', Khun Sujin said. If we try to pinpoint about this visible object or that visible object, this saññā and that saññā we really get into a tangle. All this is reasoning and thinking, thinking with doubt and it cannot solve our problems.

If we have doubts about how saññā can remember concepts, we should know that there is saññā at each moment of citta and that past markings of objects by saññā conditions remembrance of objects now. But we should not try to catch saññā, that is impossible. We should not try to catch different moments of seeing and different visible objects either. We should just know that seeing is different from thinking of shape and form and that seeing is different from visible object, and knowing this in theory can be a condition for the arising of sati later.

Question If there are no things (or persons) in reality how can concepts seem so ordered and coherent so that we relate to them so much? Why do we think of this sound as car and that as bird? Particular types of experiences are associated to formulate these concepts. It seems as though the different objects and door-ways are very much related. Could you help me sort out this tangle?

Answer As I said above, one can think of concepts without wrong view or with wrong view. We have not eradicated wrong view and thus we confuse the six doorways, we do not know yet one reality at a time, through one doorway at a time. Thus, it is not wrong to think of car or of bird, but it is wrong to take car or bird for 'self' and for things which exist. A moment of experience falls away immediately, and the objects which are experienced fall away, but we take them for things which last. In order to develop right understanding, in order to see realities as they are, there should be mindfulness of the reality which appears now, and we will learn, this can be only one nāma or rūpa at a time. The six doorways are six worlds, and they are different. When there is seeing, the world is colour, when there is hearing, the world is sound. Khun Sujin said, 'Only one world, forget about the other world. When there is mindfulness of sound, forget about the other doorways, forget about concepts.' Then it may be time for thinking about a bird, and the thinking is then the reality at that moment, not the bird, bird is a concept. Right understanding should be developed of realities, of nāma and rūpa, not of concepts, but we should not avoid thinking of concepts, because the thinking is a reality and should also be known.

Why do we relate so much to concepts? We have wrong view and ignorance, we have clinging. We take the concepts for something absolute, things which exist and are very important. We have always thought in that way, and everybody does. But is that akusala or kusala? What is well coordinated, kusala or akusala? Since we al-

ways believe 'That person is doing this to me' and do not know the real causes and results in our lives (kamma and vipāka) we continue with attachment, aversion and ignorance. If we see that this is not the way, we will develop the right understanding which can distinguish between the six worlds. Thinking is one reality, and it is completely different from seeing or hearing. We should find this out through our own experience, only that will solve our doubts about what is real.

In England someone was talking about the many nāmas and rūpas in our life and then Khun Sujin suddenly said:

"But it can be so helpful if there can be a moment of mindfulness right now."

Nothing is more helpful than that.

Question If one thinks 'I am good' or 'I am bad', is this conceit even if there is no direct comparison with another being; is the other implied in such thoughts? Can there be thinking of self without comparison? Would this simply be lobha and diṭṭhi (wrong view)?

Answer It all depends on the citta at this or at that moment. That is why mindfulness is the only way to find out about our different moments. 'I am good', we can think this in the way of: 'Now the citta is kusala' and this may be with right understanding. 'I am bad', may be 'Now the citta is akusala'. Or it can be: I, the self, is good or bad. That can be with wrong view. Or it can be with aversion. When it is comparing: I am good, he is bad, or I am bad, he is good, it is conceit. A kind of upholding of oneself. But at the moment of conceit there cannot be wrong view. That is another moment. But who can find out? Only the one who is mindful of the present moment. There is no other way.

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Also, for the benefit of others, I finish with a short conversation I had with Khun Sujin in Manchester.

N. Seeing and visible object are not the same. This should be known in the practice, not just in theory. We should know the difference between nāma and rūpa. But we always join them together instead of being aware of their different characteristics as they appear one at a time.

Khun Sujin: When there is awareness there can be a beginning of turning towards the reality which experiences (nāma), no people, no thing. Just a moment of only one world. Then we mix the different worlds we do not know what the reality is which experiences. When we begin to know what the reality is which experiences, this cannot be mixed with something else. Only reality at a time. The reality which knows something is on

world. When there is this world, there cannot be any of the other worlds. This happens when you begin to know the reality which can experience something.

N. Sometimes cold appears, but I am not sure of the reality which experiences cold.

S. When doubt arises the reality which experiences cold has fallen away already. Paññā has to become keener and sharper (Khom kla' in Thai) in order to eliminate doubt. One has to know doubt too, only a reality. If there is not 'only' ('thawnan' in Thai) there is still doubt.

(I would like to add: we may call doubt nāma, but we still take it for something, for self, for so very important. When there is the knowledge of doubt as only, only a reality, not self, there is development of right understanding and this can eliminate doubt.)

N. This is a problem.

S. This problem can be solved when sati and paññā arise, only in that way.

N. But sati does not arise often, sometimes.

S. What is most important, is paññā. It develops little by little. So that you know what the reality is which knows or experiences something. And you must have patience ('cai jen') to get to know all characteristics of nāmas and rūpas, so that paññā can develop more. It is bound to be slowly. We can read about the former lives of the Buddha, ten or eight hundred lives. If there had not been satipaṭṭhāna, how could he have become a Buddha? It had to be developed in ordinary, normal life. No matter whether he was Mahosadha, or in any of the other lives, there must have been satipaṭṭhāna, otherwise he could not have become a Buddha.

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This was the conversation. With this in mind we read the Jatakas differently, we appreciate very much the Bodhisatta when he was leading a laylife in many former births, and developing sati. Just in ordinary, normal life. There is seeing, hearing, thinking in normal life. Satipaṭṭhāna can be developed.